

East Pioneers Watershed
Executive Summary and Determination of Standards
Dillon Field Office
May 2020



This document summarizes the findings of the East Pioneers Watershed (EPW) assessment conducted during the 2019 field season. The watershed has 28 grazing allotments and contains approximately 37,457 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administered public lands. These public lands are located in townships 1 through 7 south and include ranges 9 and 10 west. The watershed boundary is generally bound to the east by Montana Highway 91, to the west by the crest of the Pioneer Mountains, to the north by Canyon Creek, and to the south by Montana Highway 278.

The EPW Assessment Report describes the existing condition of BLM administered lands within the watershed. The Assessment Report also presents management and project recommendations for improving resource conditions where needed. Please refer to the Assessment Report for a complete discussion of resource conditions, concerns and management opportunities.

In January 2020, the BLM began the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation. The NEPA document includes all BLM administered public lands covered in the EPW. Alternative Management was analyzed wherever it was determined that an allotment/pasture was not meeting the Standards, allotments were meeting Standards but had site specific resource concerns, there were habitat concerns, or other land health issues were identified.

The issue of scope and scale must be kept in mind when evaluating each standard. It is recognized that isolated sites within a landscape may not be meeting the standards; however, considering a broader scope and scale, the area may be in proper functioning condition. No single indicator provides sufficient information to determine rangeland health; they are used in combination to provide information necessary to determine rangeland health. Alternatively, just because a standard is being met does not mean that the conditions on the ground represent desired resource conditions or objectives. For example, an upland site with reduced composition of bunchgrasses may meet the upland health standard if it sustains a native plant community, even if it is dominated by low producing, low palatable grasses, shrubs and/or forbs. While such a site may have stable soils and allow for proper hydrologic function, it won't provide the forage, cover or structure that it would if it was dominated by taller, more productive plants.

In addition, every riparian reach or acre of upland habitat does not need to be rated as PFC for the allotment to meet standards. The scope of the resource being assessed and relative importance of riparian/wetland habitat or upland sites within the context of the allotment as a whole is considered to determine if the allotment is meeting standards or not. For example, if an allotment has 15 miles of riparian habitat and 13 miles of habitat is properly functioning while two miles is functioning at risk, the relative importance of the two miles that is functioning at risk is considered in making an overall determination of meeting the riparian health standard. If the two miles of stream functioning at risk has fisheries habitat, or is contributing to water quality impairment, the allotment would not meet the riparian health standard. However if the two miles of stream functioning at risk are low energy, isolated intermittent reaches or spring brooks, not hydrologically connected to larger bodies of water, the allotment as a whole may meet the riparian health standard on the condition that these isolated reaches will be addressed as site specific resource concerns.

Table 1 below lists the Authorized Officers determination of rangeland health standards by allotment for each of the 28 grazing allotments, and unallotted areas. It also briefly describes the

significant causal factors identified by the interdisciplinary team (IDT) on allotments where one or more Standards are not in compliance.

Allotment Name, Number, Category and BLM Acres	Are Rangeland Health Standards Being Met?					Contributing factors in failing to meet Standards and Summary of Resource Concerns
	Upland	Riparian	Water Quality	Air Quality	Bio-diversity	
Antelope Butte # 10118 (C) Acres: 414	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Allotment Met standards. Monitoring indicates improving vegetative conditions. Dalmatian toadflax isolated
Argenta Flats, #10687 (C) Acres:1,241	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Allotment Met standards. Monitoring indicates improving vegetative conditions.
Bell Ranch, #20197 (I) Acres: 2,326	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Allotment Met standards. Concerns about spotted knapweed, cheatgrass, and conifer expansion in the Albers Spring area. Concerns about annual growing season grazing and livestock distribution.
Big Hole Road # 10135 (C) Acres: 789	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Allotment Met Standards
Birch Creek, # 30365 (I) Acres: 2,914	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Allotment did not meet upland standard due to current livestock use, limited rest/deferment, forage utilization and livestock distribution
Burk SGC, # 20657 (C) Acres: 79	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Allotment did not meet riparian and water quality standards. Reach 519 is deeply incised

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	Upland	Riparian	Water Quality	Air Quality	Bio-diversity	
						due to altered flows from upstream private land management practices.
Buzztail, # 20161 (C) Acres: 549	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Allotment Met Standards with concerns about small cheatgrass infestations on south facing slopes
Cherry Creek, # 20321 (M) Acres: 1,482	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Allotment met standards with concerns about bluebunch wheatgrass vigor adjacent to Cherry Creek
Childs Ind. SGC, # 20310 (C) Acres: 267	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Allotment did not meet the upland health standard due to historic grazing practices. Current monitoring shows slight improvement.
Frying Pan, # 10131 (I) Acres: 2,783	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Allotment Met Standards.
Frying Pan Basin, # 30691 (C) Acres: 145	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Allotment Met Standards.
Hayden, #10134 (C) Acres: 31	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Allotment Met Standards.
Kennison Spring, #20182 (M) Acres:1,164	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Allotment Met Standards with concerns about travel management, and conifer encroachment

Allotment Name, Number, Category and BLM Acres	Are Rangeland Health Standards Being Met?					Contributing factors in failing to meet Standards and Summary of Resource Concerns
	Upland	Riparian	Water Quality	Air Quality	Bio-diversity	
Lost Creek, #20322 (C) Acres: 83	No	N/A	N/A	Yes	No	Allotment did not meet standards due to annual growing season livestock grazing impacting vegetative composition, vigor and hydrologic function.
Lost Willow, #30364 (I) Acres: 5,366	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Allotment met Standards with concerns about livestock impacts to Kambich spring and associated riparian area
Meine Cow Camp, # 20113 (M) Acres: 1,203	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Allotment met Standards.
North Willow Creek, # 30311 (C) Acres: 44	No	N/A	N/A	Yes	No	Allotment did not meet standards due to annual growing season livestock grazing impacting vegetative composition, vigor and hydrologic function.
Peck SGC, #20336 (C) Acres: 323	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Allotment met Standards.
Seven Springs, # 20337 (I) Acres: 2,133	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Allotment did not meet Standards, due to annual growing season livestock grazing impacting vegetative composition, vigor, soil stability, and hydrologic function.

Allotment Name, Number, Category and BLM Acres	Are Rangeland Health Standards Being Met?					Contributing factors in failing to meet Standards and Summary of Resource Concerns
	Upland	Riparian	Water Quality	Air Quality	Bio-diversity	
						Additional concerns about livestock grazing impacts to wetland areas.
Sisterson, # 20329 (M) Acres: 238	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Allotment met Standards.
Skeeters #10332 (I) Acres: 714	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Allotment met Standards with concerns about scattered spotted knapweed infestations.
Skeeters Meadows # 30372 (C) Acres: 57	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Allotment met Standards with concerns about scattered spotted knapweed infestations.
Smith Ind. SGC, # 10346 (C) Acres: 161	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Allotment met Standards.
South Seven Springs, # 20362 (I) Acres: 4,423	Yes/No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	The Burk, Grose, Middle, and Rieber pastures met all standards. The Bradley Pasture did not meet the upland health standard due to current annual growing season livestock grazing. Other concerns in the allotment include: Altered flows from upstream private management practices are impacting reach 519 resulting in incisement; Aspen

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	Upland	Riparian	Water Quality	Air Quality	Bio-diversity	
						clone health in the Grose Pasture; and conifer expansion into the sagebrush steppe in the Burk and Grose Pastures.
Twin Adams, # 20347 (M) Acres: 1,398	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Allotment met Standards.
Vipond-Glendale, # 30358 (I) Acres: 4,529	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Allotment met Standards with concerns about historic impacts and current livestock use on reach 516; concerns about conifer expansion into the sagebrush steppe habitat in the Louie Low pasture.
West Big Hole Road, #10503 (C) Acres: 1,715	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Allotment met Standards.
Willow Creek Ind., # 20304 (C) Acres: 197	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Allotment met Standards.
B-Rock Unavailable Acres: 40	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Area met standards with concerns about adjacent Dalmatian toadflax
Canyon Creek/Ponderosa Unavailable Acres: 1,292	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Area met standards with concerns about dispersed recreation, weeds, and conifer expansion.
Other Unavailable Acres: 445	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Areas met standards.

Standard #1: Upland Health

Five allotments and one pasture are not meeting the Upland Health Standard. These allotments/pastures include.

1) Birch Creek, 2) Childs Individual, 3) Lost Creek, 4) North Willow Creek, 5) Seven Springs, 6) Bradley Pasture of the South Seven Springs allotment.

The Birch Creek, Lost Creek, North Willow Creek, Seven Springs, and Bradley Pasture of the South Seven Springs allotment did not meet this standard due to current livestock grazing management.

The Childs Individual did not meet the upland health standard. However, I have determined that this is due to previous livestock grazing management practices. Following the 2009 East Pioneers Watershed decision, the management on this allotment was modified. I have reviewed the monitoring data for this allotment and have determined that vegetative conditions are improving, and upland health is making progress towards meeting this Standard on this allotment, under current livestock grazing management.

Standard #2: Riparian/Wetland

One allotment, the Burk allotment did not meet the riparian/wetland Standard. This allotment did not meet this standard to past upstream water management practices occurring on private lands and are outside the control of the Authorized Officer.

Standard #3: Water Quality

The 2018 Montana DEQ integrated report lists the Big Hole River, Trapper Creek, Grose Creek, Lost Creek, and Willow Creek on the 303(d)/305(b) lists as impaired. I have reviewed the assessment report as well as individual stream reach PFC forms associated with BLM reaches that are located on or are tributaries to these streams. Based on the evaluation matrix shown in Figure 1, Appendix C of the Assessment Report, I have determined that one allotment, the Burk allotment is not meeting the water quality standard. I have also determined that BLM authorized activities are not the causal factor, as discussed under Standard #3 Riparian Wetland.

Standard #4: Air Quality

All allotments in the East Pioneers Watershed are meeting this Standard.

Standard #5 Biodiversity

Three allotments do not meet the Bio-diversity standard. These allotments are 1) Lost Creek, 2) North Willow Creek, 3) Seven Springs. These allotments do not meet this standard due to impacts from current livestock grazing management practices.

NEPA Documentation

The Dillon Field Office has completed the East Pioneers Watershed Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-MT-B050-2020-0005-EA) during the winter/spring of 2020. Within this EA, the Dillon Field Office has presented and analyzed a reasonable range of management alternatives based on the recommendations from the East Pioneers Assessment Report and external scoping. Before implementation of any of the alternatives analyzed in the East Pioneer Watershed EA, the

BLM will offer a public comment period, prepare the necessary decision documents, and follow guidance for administrative remedies. Implementation of new plans will begin upon the Authorized Officer's decision(s) becoming final and may take several seasons to fully implement.

For more information, please review the East Pioneers Watershed Assessment Report or contact the Dillon Field Office at (406) 683-8000.

Authorized Officer's Determination:

Based on my review of the Assessment Team's recommendations and other relevant data and information, I have determined that the following 22 allotments and Unallotted parcels within the East Pioneers Watershed meet the Standards for Rangeland (Land) Health and Guidelines for Grazing Management for BLM lands in Montana:

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| 1. Antelope Butte | 13. Peck SGC |
| 2. Argenta Flats | 14. Sisterson |
| 3. Bell Ranch | 15. Skeeters |
| 4. Big Hole Road | 16. Skeeters Meadows |
| 5. Buzztail | 17. Smith Individual |
| 6. Cherry Creek | 18. South Seven Springs (Burk, Grose, Middle, Rieber Pastures) |
| 7. Frying Pan | 19. Twin Adams |
| 8. Frying Pan Basin | 20. Vipond Glendale |
| 9. Hayden | 21. West Big Hole Road |
| 10. Kennison Spring | 22. Willow Creek Individual |
| 11. Lost Willow | 23. All un-allotted areas |
| 12. Meine Cow Camp | |

I have determined that the following 7 Allotments are **not meeting** all Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Management for BLM lands in Montana:

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| 1. Birch Creek | 5. North Willow Creek |
| 2. Burk SGC | 6. Seven Springs |
| 3. Childs Individual | 7. South Seven Springs (Bradley Pasture) |
| 4. Lost Creek | |

Current livestock management was determined to be a significant causal factor in the Birch Creek, Lost Creek, North Willow Creek, Seven Springs, and Bradley Pasture of the South Seven Springs Allotments not meeting the Standards. Current uses authorized by BLM are not contributing to failure to meet land health standards within the Burk SGC or Childs Individual Allotments.

Upland Conditions are not meeting standards in the Childs allotment due to historic livestock grazing, however monitoring data shows that the changes to livestock grazing management that were initiated following the 2009 permit renewal decision are improving upland health conditions. Therefore, I have determined that current livestock use is not the causal factor, and that significant progress toward meeting upland health is occurring under current management on the Childs Individual Allotment.

The Burk SGC allotment did not meet the riparian or water quality Standards. Riparian Reach 519 is a highly altered system due to augmented flows. These flows have resulted in downcutting and incision, reducing the system's ability to access its flood plain, support vegetative communities to stabilize banks, and store water. These augmented flows are a result of private property management practices occurring immediately above the BLM managed public land and are outside the control of the BLM.

Pursuant to 43 CFR 4180.2(c), the authorized officer shall take appropriate action as soon as practical but not later than the start of the next grazing year upon determining that existing grazing management practices or levels of grazing use on public lands are significant factors in

failing to achieve the standards. Appropriate action means implementing actions that will result in significant progress towards fulfillment of the standards. Practices and activities subject to standards and guidelines include the development or revision of Allotment Management Plans (AMP), establishment of terms and conditions of permits, leases, and other grazing authorizations, and range improvement activities such as vegetation manipulation, fence construction and development of water.



Blaine Newman: Acting Dillon Field Manager



Date